

## First International Congress on Eastern Christianity (University of Cordova, 15-17 November 2005)

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In the two years publication of the journal *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia*, a broad and decisive impulse for the knowledge of the Eastern Christianity has been carried out by the University of Cordova. This 'First International Congress on Eastern Christianity' needs a scientific forum coming out from the up to now classical framework, while offering the Syriologists, Copticists, Ethiopist, Arabists together with the Byzantinists the opportunity to create an interdisciplinary environment and therefore to represent the 'Christian Orient'.

The First International Congress on Eastern Christianity was held in the Faculty of Arts, University of Cordova, from 15th to 17th November 2005. The great professionalism of Profs. Monferrer-Sala and Urbán was really useful to organize and prepare the congress. All the discussions took place in the 'Aula Magna' of the Faculty, a beautiful place which helped the organizers to create a friendly environment during the Congress and, at the same time, it allowed the participants to meet. The warm hospitality included not only the accommodation and maintenance, but also a guided excursion to the Cathedral-Mosque of Cordova at the end of the Congress.

Twenty-three papers were presented about Eastern Christianity by the participants, coming from Europe, North America and the Middle East. As attendance was not limited, other scholars from Europe and the United States also took part in the Congress. Each of the participants had 20 minutes to expose his research and, at the end of each session, there were also 30 minutes to discuss any point of the papers. The themes ranged from Christian Arabic topics to Syriac, Coptic, and Greek ones. This is the main reason why, at the end of the Congress, there was also a part devoted to the presentation of current projects on these different studies.

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The following is a comprehensive listing of the topics discussed in the twenty-three sessions, in the same order of the programme. The papers of those participants who so desired shall be edited and published in a volume which will come out soon.

Samir Khalil SAMIR (CEDRAC, Université Saint-Joseph, Beirut): «Rôle culturel des chrétiens en Orient».

Ángel URBÁN FERNÁNDEZ (University of Cordova): «An unpublished Graeco-Arabic Ms. of Luke's Gospel (BnF, suppl. Grec 911) from the 11th century».

Juan NADAL CAÑELLAS (Oriental Institute, Rome): «Le rôle de Grégoire Akindynos dans la controverse hésychaste du XIV<sup>ème</sup> siècle à Byzance».

David HERNÁNDEZ DE LA FUENTE (Carlos III University, Madrid): «Nonnus' Paraphrase of the Gospel of St. John: Pagan models for Christian literature».

Manuel MARCOS ALDON (University of Cordova): «Une initiale ornée dans le ms. BnF suppl. grec 911».

Sebastià JANERAS (Faculty of Theology, Barcelona): «Diffusion d'Isaac de Ninive dans la Péninsule Ibérique».

Pablo ARGÁRATE (Faculty of Theology, Univ. of St. Michael's College, Canada): «Spirit, Light and Fire in Joseph Hazzaya's Letter on the Three Stages of Monastic Life».

Harald SUERMANN (Universität Bonn): «The Old Testament and the Jews in the dialogue between the Jacobite Patriarch John I and Sa'īd ibn 'Amīr».

Luíz Filipe THOMAZ (Instituto de Estudos Orientais, Lisboa): «The Christians of Saint Thomas in Luso-Oriental Sources».

Ignacio CARBAJOSA (Instituto 'San Dámaso', Madrid): «The Syriac Biblical Tradition: Between Jerusalem and Athens».

Herman TEULE (Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, Netherlands): «The Syriac Renaissance (12th-13th cent.): Creativity and Openness».

Amalia ZOMEÑO (CSIC, Granada): «The Christian Arabic MSS preserved in Montserrat Abbey (Barcelona)».

Sofía TORALLAS TOVAR (CSIC, Madrid): «Coptic texts in the Spanish collections».

Emmanouela GRYPEOU (University of Cambridge, United Kingdom): «'The Visions of Apa Shenute of Atripe': An Analysis in the History of Traditions of Eastern Christian Apocalyptic Motifs».

- Mark N. SWANSON (Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA): «'Our Father Abba Mark': Marqus al-Antūnī and the Construction of Sainthood in Fourteenth-Century Egypt».
- Clare E. WILDE (Georgetown University, USA): «*Lingua sacra*? Some early Melkite views on the 'inimitable' Qur'ān».
- Adel Y. SIDARUS (IICT- Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical, Lisboa, Portugal): «The Pre-Renaissance of Copto-Arabic Culture».
- Francisco DEL RÍO SÁNCHEZ (University of Barcelona): «The Aramaean speakers of Iraq in the Arabic sources».
- Juan Pedro MONFERRER-SALA (University of Cordova): «A Greek loanword in Aramaic. Something else on the Pešittā *hapax legomenon* 'espaynīqē».
- Massimo PAZZINI (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Jerusalem): «Methodological problems in Syriac neotestamentary lexicography».
- María Teresa PENELAS MELÉNDEZ (CSIC, Granada): «Two Oriental-Christian apologetic texts in a Maghribi codex».
- Philippe ROISSE (University of Granada): «Une version arabe-andalusi de l'Épître de S. Paul aux Galates».
- Federico CORRIENTE (University of Saragossa): «The Psalter fragment from the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus: a birth certificate of Nabaṭī Arabic».

The following summaries give evidence of the great richness of the contents discussed during this Congress. Prof. Samir carried out a historical research about the Arabic literature of the Christians in order to analyse their real cultural contribution. In Palestine, Christians translated Biblical and Patristic texts, from 8th to 10th c., producing a very important apologetic literature. At the same time, it is developed in Iraq from 8th to 9th c., the presentation not only of the Christian faith based on Coran and the reason, but also of medicine, sciences and philosophy, which deeply marked the Arabo-Islamic thoughts. After centuries 12th to 14th, the age of the decadence came, although it became, on the contrary, a period of remarkable pre-renaissance for those Christians settled in Syria-Liban during 17th and 18th centuries. In 19th and 20th centuries, the Syrian-Liban Christians played an excellent role in all the fields so that the Renaissance (*Nahḍah*) was born.

Prof. Urbán, on his part, presents the bilingual Ms of Luke, which being at present in the French National Library in Paris, comes in turn from the Library of the St. Sepulchre of Jerusalem. This Greek-Arabic Ms is the only well known and currently catalogued of the Gospel of Luke. The copy dates from June 1043, as the copyist himself explicitly states in the colophon. Although the dating has a relative value for the text, the date of this MS is relevant, as it is one of the oldest MS in the text of Luke. Within the Greek-Arabic tradition, this MS should have had pride of place among the top few, due to its long age. Prof. Urbán emphasized some points such as the structure of the Codex, its physical state (its *lacunae* and different hands), some palaeographic features related specially to the Greek writing, some philological characteristics, some relevant notes on the Arabic translation, the textual tradition and its evaluation, and some remarks on the relevance of the MS.

The next paper, «Nonnus' Paraphrase of the Gospel of St. John: Pagan models for Christian literature», by Dr. David Hernández, aims to point out the interesting literary endeavour of Nonnus, who wrote the *Dionysiaca*, a Mythological Epic about Dionysos and a Christian Paraphrase of the Gospel of St. John, both in the Homeric manner. Being heavily influenced by pagan literary models, Nonnus' Paraphrase has many traces of Dionysiac myths and neoplatonism, although, on the other hand, the *Dionysiaca* can also be interpreted in the light of the Christian Gospels. Such syncretism tells us a lot not only about Nonnus' possible intention but also about his poetics.

Prof. Sebastià Janeras analysed the Latin translation of the "First collection of Isaac de Ninive (VII c.)", also known with different titles (*De contemplatione*, *De religione*, *De contemptu mundi*, etc.), from 13th c., which went into the Iberian Peninsula in the same century (Arnau de Vilanova knows it). It was translated into Catalan in the 14th c. (Francesc Eximenis quotes Isaac in Catalan), from which two manuscripts from 15th c. are kept; into Portuguese (three manuscripts from the 15th c. are kept); and into Spanish, work by Bernat Boïl, from Monserrat (1484, printed in Zaragoza in 1497); other Spanish translation was printed in Seville in 197. The first whole translation from the Latin text is that of Barcelona, 1497, commissioned by the abbot of Monserrat García Jiménez de Cisneros.

In his paper, Prof. Argárate engages a survey on the semantic domains of the image/symbol of fire in the writings of Joseph Hazzaya. This Syriac mystical author of the eighth century uses that

highly relevant symbol/image with regard to four different areas: the demonic sphere, an opposition to that sphere, the divine realm, and, finally, the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Harald Suermann, on his part, states that a Jew and the Old Testament play a very important role in the dialogue between the Jacobite Patriarch John I and 'Umayr ibn Sa'd al-'Amīr. In recent times, this was the reason why the text was dated so lately, that is to say, at the end of the seventh century. A further argument was that the text gives information about Islam, which could only be known in a later state. According to the text, the dialogue happened in the first half of the seventh century. A detailed analysis of the text shows that there is no detailed information about Islam or Muslim. The comparison with other early Christian texts on Islam shows that the role of the Jew and the Old Testament in the dialogue rather indicates a very early redaction of the text.

Prof. Ignacio Carbajosa analyses how the Syriac OT tradition started from Hebrew texts and underwent a gradual influence which tended to bring it closer to the Greek version of the Septuagint. His paper tries to describe this process by exploring the history of the Syriac biblical tradition in its historical and theological context. In the final part, he shows the process described, using the textual tradition of the *Pešittā* Psalter.

Prof. Herman Teule maintains that the 12th and 13th centuries constitute a special period in the history of Syriac literature. Its originality lies, firstly, in a new approach of the doctrinal theological (Christological) divisions of the past, which gave rise to the composition of some special 'ecumenical' treatises, and, secondly, the bilingualism (knowledge of Arabic next to Syriac) of the major authors of this period, which allowed them to integrate Islamic cultural and spiritual concepts into their thinking. In his paper, he especially highlights the growing contribution to Syriac studies by members of the different Syriac communities and the recent rediscovery of the Syriac Church Fathers in orthodox circles of Eastern Europe.

Dr. Amalia Zomeño provides, in her paper, new information of the twelve Christian Arabic manuscripts preserved in the Library of Montserrat Abbey (Barcelona). These manuscripts are only a part of the whole collection of Arabic manuscripts containing 54 volumes. Except for a miscellaneous volume containing Arabic grammars, most of the Christian Arabic manuscripts show a religious subject: two

versions of the Bible (Psalter and the Gospels), different pious readings, liturgical texts, and other works related to the monastic life.

Dr. Sofia Torallas Tovar states that, despite the fact that Spain is a country without much tradition in Coptic studies, there is some interesting material in a few collections. The main interest lies on the papyrological collections: the Abbey of Montserrat owns a papyrological collection of about 1500 pieces, of which about 60% are Coptic documents and some fragments of old literary codices. They also possess a small group of liturgical Copto-Arabic manuscripts and some parts of manuscripts of a later date (XVI-XVIII cent.). The Palau Ribes collection, owned by the Jesuits in Barcelona, has about 3000 papyri, many of them Coptic, and 37 ostraka. The National archaeological Museum also owns a small number of ostraka, and some epigraphy brought by the Spanish missions in Nubia in the 60s.

Dr. Emmanouela Grypeou discusses in her paper a Copto-Arabic text of apocalyptic character, known as the Visions of Shenute. This late text, now preserved in Ethiopic, reflects the political and historical changes that led to a reconstruction of Christian community identity under Muslim rule. The analysis of this text showed further how the confrontation with Islam affected the development and transformation of Eastern Christian apocalyptic literature

Prof. Clare Wilde points out that some of the earliest Christian Arabic writings that have survived demonstrate an intimate familiarity with the text of the holy book of Islam. Some even use the Qur'ān to 'prove' Christian truths. But how did these early Christian Arabophones view the 'inimitable' nature of the Qur'ān, as defined by Islamic orthodoxy? Additionally, what developments in the discussions of languages other than Arabic can be seen among these Christians living in the Islamic world? As the earliest extant Christian Arabic texts come from the Melkite community, texts from this community form the basis of her study.

Prof. Sidarus analyses how in the second half of the 12th century, as the Fatimid power was declined and the Ayyubids took over the destiny of Egypt and the whole Near East, one witnesses a cultural and literary burgeoning among the Copts that announces the golden age of their literature definitely written in Arabic. The artistic activity entered fully in renaissance, while the intellectual production began just to sketch out the main trends that will assert themselves in the following century: abundant and varied output, polygraphism and

encyclopedia, secular and universal opening, resolute integration in the surrounding Arabic Islamic culture.

Prof. del Río studies the terminology used by Arabic writers to name the Aramaic speakers of Iraq and their language. The Arabic writers adopted the Syriac Aramaic tradition, and used the words “suryānī” and “nabaṭī” to describe the native Aramaic inhabitants of this area. Besides, they inform about two main dialectal varieties of spoken Aramaic in this zone (called ‘suryāniyya’ and ‘nabaṭiyya’), different to the literary dialects of that period. Despite the confusion when using these terms and when taking into account that the analysed texts are merely commentaries inside geographical or historical works, this information can be useful to other studies.

Prof. Monferrer-Sala discusses in his paper the *hapax* included by Joosten in a *corpus*. The author’s opinion is that “it is difficult to attain certainty concerning the etymology of the lexeme in question”, after having stated that “a first obstacle in studying Greek words in Syriac is posed by problems of identification”. The problematic of this loanword –like so many others– is conditioned by the mutation of the transliteration from the original language to the foreign one (in this case, from Greek to Aramaic language), but, above all, by two factors: the history of the text transmission and the world of the Biblical translations in Ancient age, both especially related to the Pešittā version. In the latter case, for instance, if one compares the Greek works contained in the Pešittā and the Targums, one can find that there are some examples of overlap. Monferrer-Sala’s aim in this paper is to prove that it could be an already solved out question when starting from the hypothesis that the Greek φοινικῆ seems to be the etymon.

Prof. Massimo Pazzini points out a number of problems with the text of the Syriac New Testament, in particular the vocalisation of a number of words. In order to have a complete critical edition of the Syriac NT, he will attempt to verify the texts in a precise manner so as to establish a text that is grammatically correct.

Dr. Mayte Penelas studies the codex Raqqada 2003/2 containing fragments belonging to, at least, two different Arabic Christian apologies, apart from the summary of world history, studied by G. Levi Della Vida in the sixties. One of the apologies is a version of the well-known dialogue between the Nestorian patriarch Timothy I and the Abbasid caliph al-Mahdī. She also compares the version of this controversy inserted in the codex of Raqqada both with the Syriac

original text and the other Arabic translations, and describes thoroughly the rest of the material of an apologetic nature.

Philippe Roisse analyzes a bilingual Latin-Arabic fragment from the Epistle of Galates (Gal. I, 1-15 et III, 6-24), discovered in Sigüenza and nowadays kept in Vatican (Ms. Vat. Lat. 12.900), which has been dated from 9th-10th centuries by D. De Bruyne and edited at the beginning of 20th c. by E. Tisserant. When comparing this fragment with the quasi-complete text of the same version kept in the ms. Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional Cod. Ar. 4971 (the existence of which had been ignored by the editor), it is nowadays possible to complete the missing parts of the edition by Cardinal Tisserant and to correct some of his reading hypotheses.

To sum up, it is worth mentioning the closing keynote by Prof. Corriente, who states that there is sufficient evidence to posit Nabaṭī Arabic, as the immediate forerunner of Neo-Arabic, in the northern regions of the Middle East inhabited by Arabs even many decades before Islam, and to believe that the early papyri are the living on-the-spot proof of that situation. In the case of the Psalm fragment discovered by Violet in the *Qubbat al-Ḥaznah* of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, we might be in front of a birth certificate of Nabaṭī Arabic, with all the usual ingredients of a variety of language developed on foreign soil and having gone through the stages of creolization and partial decreolization, as shown by such traits as morphosyntactic simplification, particularly the loss of case and mood marks, slight morphological interference, in the case of the pronominal suffixes and of some peculiar loanwords, by the substratal language. Of course, a birth certificate is not necessarily issued immediately after its occasion: in this case, the newborn had been around for probably no less than two centuries before but, for notorious reasons inherent to the pre-Islamic Arab milieu, no earlier indisputable and explicit proof of its existence had reached us before Violet's fragment.

The wide-ranging spectrum of the Congress, which was shown in many of the individual and quite specialized contributions, became extraordinarily profitable thanks to the one hour keynotes in which the chosen specialized dimensions, that is to say, P. Samir for the Christian-Arabic Legacy, Prof. Sidarus for the Coptic-Arabic Literature, Prof. Teule for the Syriac Culture and Prof. Corriente for the Arabic Linguistics, will offer the possibility to present central issues in a very detailed way. In the same way, the presentation of the Current Projects also had a great value, Syriac studies by Prof. Teule,



Coptic studies by Dr. Torallas Tovar and Christian-Arabic studies by P. Samir. However, it is worth mentioning a sorrow word as, despite the fact that the Congress has been held in a personal university environment, it has found not much attention on the part of the local students audience. At the same time, one can also ask why English and French languages were the only languages used during the Congress and why it was not highlighted the national language.

We really hope that the next Congress could be held in 2007 in Barcelona, although the exact date is not fixed upon yet, neither the topic.